

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A connector comprising:

a housing defining a first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread extending around a portion of the housing and a second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread extending around a portion of the housing, wherein the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread comprises a first pitch that is coarser than a second pitch of the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread; and

a locking ring defining a thread engagement member,

wherein the thread engagement member first engages the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread and then successively engages the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to secure the locking ring to the housing with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the locking ring that corresponds with the first pitch of the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread and the second pitch of the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread.

2. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 1, wherein the thread engagement member comprises two radial protrusions that successively engage the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread and the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread.

3. (Original) The connector of Claim 2, wherein the two radial protrusions are diametrically opposed.

4. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 2 further comprising at least one thread protrusion disposed within the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread such that at least one of the radial protrusions engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

5. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 4 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread to limit travel of the locking ring.

6. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 2 further comprising two thread protrusions disposed within the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread such that the two radial protrusions engage the two thread protrusions to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

7. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 6 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread to limit travel of the locking ring.

8. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 1 further comprising at least one thread protrusion disposed within the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread such that the thread engagement member engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

9. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 1 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread to limit travel of the locking ring.

10. (Original) The connector of Claim 1, wherein the locking ring further comprises an exterior surface defining a plurality of axial ridges for gripping the locking ring during operation.

11. (Currently Amended) A housing for use in a connector, the housing comprising:

a first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread extending around a portion of the housing, the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread defining a first pitch; and

a second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread extending around a portion of the housing, the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread defining a second pitch,

wherein a component first engages the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread and then successively engages the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to secure the component to the housing with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the component that corresponds with the first pitch and the second pitch.

12. (Currently Amended) The housing of Claim 11 further comprising at least one thread protrusion disposed within the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread such that the component engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

13. (Currently Amended) The housing of Claim 11 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to limit travel of the component.

14. (Currently Amended) A socket housing for use in a plasma arc apparatus comprising:

a first ~~threaded portion~~ thread defining a first pitch; and

a second ~~threaded portion~~ thread defining a second pitch,

wherein a component first engages the first ~~threaded portion~~ thread and then successively engages the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread to secure the component to the socket housing with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the component that corresponds with the first pitch and the second pitch.

15. (Currently Amended) The housing of Claim 14 further comprising at least one thread protrusion disposed within the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread such that the component engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

16. (Currently Amended) The housing of Claim 14 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread to limit travel of the component.

17-24. (Cancelled)

25. (Currently Amended) A fluid and electric connector for use in a plasma arc apparatus comprising:

a housing defining a first ~~threaded portion~~ thread defining a first pitch and

a second ~~threaded portion~~ thread defining a second pitch;

at least one thread protrusion disposed within the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread; and

a locking ring defining a thread engagement member,

wherein the thread engagement member first engages the first ~~threaded portion~~ thread and then successively engages the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread to secure the locking ring to the housing with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the locking ring that corresponds with the first pitch and the second pitch, and the thread engagement member engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

26. (Original) The connector of Claim 25 further comprising two thread protrusions, wherein the thread engagement member engages the two thread protrusions.

27. (Original) The connector of Claim 25, wherein the thread protrusion defines first and second sloped surfaces such that the thread engagement member passes over the first and second sloped surfaces to facilitate engagement with the thread protrusion.

28. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 25 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of the second ~~threaded portion~~ thread to limit travel of the locking ring.

29. (Currently Amended) A connector comprising:
a housing defining multiple ~~threaded portions~~ threads extending around a portion of and along a length of the housing, wherein each successive ~~threaded portion~~ thread along the length comprises a pitch that is different than a pitch of a previous ~~threaded portion~~ thread; and

a locking ring defining a thread engagement member,

wherein the thread engagement member successively engages the ~~multiple threaded-portion~~ threads to secure the locking ring to the housing with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the locking ring that corresponds with the pitches of the multiple ~~threaded-portion~~ threads.

30. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 29, wherein the thread engagement member comprises two radial protrusions that engage the multiple ~~threaded-portion~~ threads.

31. (Original) The connector of Claim 30, wherein the two radial protrusions are diametrically opposed.

32. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 30 further comprising at least one thread protrusion disposed within a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread such that at least one radial protrusion engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

33. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 32 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to limit travel of the locking ring.

34. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 30 further comprising two thread protrusions disposed within a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread such that the two radial protrusions engage the two thread protrusions to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

35. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 34 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to limit travel of the locking ring.

36. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 29 further comprising at least one thread protrusion disposed within a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread such that the thread engagement member engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

37. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 29 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to limit travel of the locking ring.

38. (Original) The connector of Claim 29, wherein the locking ring further comprises an exterior surface defining a plurality of axial ridges for gripping the locking ring during operation.

39. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 29, wherein the thread engagement member is internal to the locking ring and the multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads are external to the housing.

40. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 29, wherein the thread engagement member is external to the locking ring and the multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads are internal to the housing.

41. (Currently Amended) A connector comprising:
a housing defining a first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread and a second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread, wherein the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread comprises a first pitch that is coarser than a second pitch of the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread;
two thread protrusions disposed within the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread; and

a locking ring defining a thread engagement member, the thread engagement member comprising two diametrically opposed radial protrusions,

wherein the radial protrusions first engage the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread and then successively engage the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to secure the locking ring to the housing with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the locking ring that corresponds with the first pitch of the first ~~threaded-portion~~ thread and the second pitch of the second ~~threaded-portion~~ thread, and the radial protrusions engage the thread protrusions to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

42. (Currently Amended) A connector comprising:

a first component defining a thread engagement member; and

a second component defining multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads, wherein each successive ~~threaded-portion~~ thread comprises a pitch that is different than a pitch of a previous ~~threaded-portion~~ thread,

wherein the thread engagement member engages the multiple ~~threaded-portion~~ threads to secure the first component to the second component with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the first component that corresponds with the pitches of the multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads.

43. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 42, wherein the thread engagement member is internal to the first component and the multiple ~~threaded-portion~~ threads are external to the second component.

44. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 42, wherein the thread engagement member is external to the first component and the multiple ~~threaded-portion~~ threads are internal to the second component.

45. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 42 further comprising at least one thread protrusion disposed within a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread such that the thread engagement member engages the thread protrusion to provide an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition.

46. (Currently Amended) The connector of Claim 42 further comprising a lateral stop disposed at an end of a ~~threaded-portion~~ thread to limit travel of the first component.

47. (Currently Amended) A method of connecting two components, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) engaging a first component comprising a thread engagement member with a second component comprising multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads extending along a length of the second component, wherein each successive ~~threaded-portion~~ thread along the length comprises a pitch that is different than a pitch of a previous ~~threaded-portion~~ thread; and

(b) rotating the first component such that the thread engagement member successively engages the multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads,

wherein the thread engagement member engages the multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads to secure the first component to the second component with a varying amount of axial travel per rotation of the first component that corresponds with the pitches of the multiple ~~threaded-portions~~ threads.

48. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 47 further comprising the step of:

rotating the first component until the thread engagement member engages a thread protrusion within a ~~threaded portion~~ thread,

wherein an audible and tactile indication of a fully mated condition occurs.

49. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 48 further comprising the step of:

rotating the first component until the thread engagement member engages a lateral stop at an end of a ~~threaded portion~~ thread,

wherein travel of the first component is limited by the lateral stop.